

**CITY OF RIO DELL
CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING MINUTES:
Tuesday, February 3, 2026**

Date: Tuesday, February 3, 2026

Time: 6:00 PM

Location: City Council Chambers, 675 Wildwood Avenue, Rio Dell, CA

A. CALL TO ORDER

The regular meeting of the Rio Dell City Council was called to order at approximately 6:00 PM.

B. ROLL CALL

Present:

Mayor Garnes
Mayor Pro Tem Carter
Council Member Orr
Council Member Woodall

Excused Absence:

Council Member Wilson

Staff Present:

City Manager Knopp
Finance Director Sanborn
Police Chief Phinney
City Clerk Dunham (retiring)
Water Superintendent Jensen
Wastewater Superintendent Moore
Senior Fiscal Assistant Maciel

C. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Mayor Garnes.

D. CEREMONIAL MATTERS

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1. Proclamation Honoring the Retirement of City Clerk Karen Dunham (Item 2026/0203.01)

Mayor Garnes presented a proclamation honoring City Clerk Karen Dunham upon her retirement after over 44 years of distinguished service to the City of Rio Dell.

Key highlights from the proclamation:

Employment with the City of Rio Dell since December 1981

Served in various capacities:

Assistant City Clerk (December 17, 1981 - April 3, 1983)

Deputy City Clerk (April 4, 1983 - December 31, 2000)

Administrative Assistant (January 1, 2001 - December 10, 2006)

Acting City Clerk (December 11, 2006 - December 1, 2008)

City Clerk (December 2, 2008 - present)

Provided exemplary administrative support including preparation of agendas, public notices, and minutes

Managed city records, maintained and codified municipal codes

Served as city elections official for all municipal elections

Served as filing officer for Fair Political Practices Commission conflict of interest statements

Served as custodian of the city's official seal

The City Council expressed heartfelt gratitude and appreciation on behalf of the residents and businesses of Rio Dell for Karen Dunham's outstanding service and wished her well in her well-deserved retirement.

Photos were taken to commemorate the occasion.

E. PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS

Rick Pelren, 127 Metropolitan Heights, addressed the Council:

Congratulated Karen Dunham on her retirement and thanked her for her service, noting she "ran a tight ship" and kept things running "like a well-oiled machine".

Reported that the senior exercise group has acquired 10 new chairs through cooperation between the Fortuna Senior Center and the City's Resource Center due to growing participation.

Expressed appreciation to the City Council for their continued support of the senior exercise program and providing a place for seniors to work out and achieve their goals.

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Noted the vibrant senior community and thanked the Council for responding to requests for assistance during times of need.

No additional public comments were received via Zoom or email.

F. CONSENT CALENDAR

Mayor Garnes pulled Item 3 from the Consent Calendar for separate consideration.

The following items were approved on the Consent Calendar:

ACTION: Motion by Council Member Woodall, seconded by Council Member Carter, to approve Consent Calendar Items 1 and 2. Motion carried 4-0.

Items Approved:

1. Minutes of the January 20, 2026 Regular Meeting (Item 2026/0203.02)
2. Authorization for the City Manager to Appoint Finance Director Travis Sanborn as Acting City Manager During Periods of Temporary Absence or Disability (Item 2026/0203.03)

G. ITEMS REMOVED FROM THE CONSENT CALENDAR

Item 3: 2025 General Plan Annual Progress Report (Item 2026/0203.04)

Mayor Garnes identified an error on page 16-17 of the General Plan Annual Progress Report, specifically in paragraph/item 10 regarding sign regulation amendments. The report stated "rezone a portion of the city's wastewater disposal field on the west side of 101 to facilitate a total of three billboards, including the community oriented billboard for use by the Chamber of Commerce."

Mayor Garnes clarified that the Council was very clear there would only be ONE community-oriented billboard on the west side of Highway 101, not three total billboards.

The City Manager acknowledged the error and also noted formatting issues with the report, including black lines obscuring some text, which staff attributed to a recent printer change.

ACTION: The City Manager recommended continuing this item to the next Council meeting to correct the billboard language and address formatting issues. The Council agreed to continue the item without a vote.

H. REPORTS/STAFF COMMUNICATIONS

1. City Manager/Staff Update (Item 2026/0203.05)

City Manager Report:

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Recruitment for City Clerk position is underway with strong interest; over 84 applications received.

Interviews scheduled to begin soon.

Staff will continue working to narrow down the selection for the next City Clerk.

Council Comments on Staff Report:

Council Member Carter:

Noted that three cats were transported to Miranda's shelter (preferring when the number is zero) and no dogs

Expressed belief that the City is improving on animal control

Reminded the public about the spay/neuter voucher program and that spring is approaching (animal reproduction season)

Thanked the Police Department for their work with animals and in general

Thanked Public Works staff and City Hall staff for their excellent work

Council Member Orr: No questions

Council Member Woodall: No questions

Mayor Barnes:

No questions but had a comment regarding dog waste on sidewalks.

Identified a significant issue with dog feces on sidewalks, particularly between Columbus and Edwards streets.

Urged pet owners listening to clean up after their pets.

Indicated she would discuss the matter further with the Police Chief.

No questions or comments from the public.

I. SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS/STUDY SESSIONS

None.

J. SPECIAL CALL ITEMS/COMMUNITY AFFAIRS/PUBLIC HEARINGS

1. Painter Street Sewer Line Replacement Project - Bid Award (Item 2026/0203.06)

City Manager Presentation:

Reminded Council that in May 2025, the Council approved a resolution to enter into a funding agreement with the State Water Resources Control Board to

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receive \$1.49 million in grant funding for the Painter Street Sewer Line Replacement Project.

Following the bidding process conducted with the city engineer, Mercer Fraser Company, Inc. was determined to be the low bidder at \$1,570,283.50.

This creates a funding gap of approximately \$80,000 plus additional contingencies.

The bid amount is very close to the target and is viewed favorably by staff.

Staff is working with the State Water Resources Control Board to bridge the funding gap and has been told additional funding would likely be available, as this is a high priority project for both the state and the city.

If additional state funding is not secured, staff will return with alternative actions for this high priority project.

Background Information Provided:

The city's sewer collection system is highly impaired and needs significant investment.

Combined water and wastewater rates in Rio Dell are high for the area (though not the highest).

The city cannot raise rates higher than current levels, making grant funding essential for addressing strategic infrastructure issues.

The Painter Street line (the final leg into the wastewater treatment plant, which actually comes off of Painter Street rather than being on it) is undersized and poorly constructed with bows and dips in the gravity-fed line.

The city engineers have developed a design strategy to replace the line.

The project aims to eliminate sanitary sewer overflows in this section of the collection system.

Staff hopes to complete the project in 2026.

Staff is working closely with the state, noting that state finance mechanisms shut down for approximately four months during construction season.

A memorandum from city engineer GHD with additional engineering details was included in the Council packet.

City Manager Recommendations:

1. Award the Painter Street Sewer Line Replacement Project to Mercer Fraser Company, Inc. for \$1,570,283.50
2. Authorize the City Manager to enter into a construction agreement with Mercer Fraser Company, Inc. in coordination with the City Attorney

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The City Manager noted that another agenda item will likely be needed once final budget approval is received from the state to determine contingency allowances.

Council Questions: None

Public Comment: None

ACTION: Motion by Council Member Carter, seconded by Council Member Woodall, to authorize the City Manager to award the bid for the Painter Street Sewer Line Replacement Project to Mercer Fraser Company, Inc. for \$1,570,283.50 and to authorize the City Manager to enter into a construction agreement with Mercer Fraser Company, Inc. in coordination with the City Attorney. Motion carried 4-0.

K. ORDINANCES/SPECIAL RESOLUTIONS/PUBLIC HEARINGS

1. Resolution No. 1662-2026 Updating the Wastewater Strength Classification System (Item 2026/0203.07)

City Manager Presentation:

The Council previously asked staff to review issues related to coffee shops and the wastewater strength classification system.

Staff is recommending changes to the classification format.

Background Information:

In May 2014, the city adopted a wastewater rate structure based on a study by Bartle Wells Associates.

This established a sewer strength classification system based on rate study experience, standard industry practice, and State Water Resources Control Board revenue program guidelines.

The classification system has been in continuous use since adoption.

The current controlling resolution was vague regarding classification of coffee shop facilities.

Proposed Classification Changes:

Coffee shop facilities meeting the following criteria would be reclassified:

- No dishwasher
- No garbage disposal
- No food preparation on site
- No grease trap installed

Previous Classification: Medium strength (one tier up from domestic)

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Proposed New Classification: Domestic strength

The recommendation is based on guidance from the city's current consultant, LT Consultants (an offshoot of Bartle Wells with employee-owners who conducted the original study).

The attached resolution only changes the attachment to the original resolution.

The reclassification would affect only one business currently.

The resolution authorizes refunding the difference in classifications retroactive to July 1, 2025 (current fiscal year start).

No major impact to the overall rate structure.

Additional Information:

The city's wastewater strength classification structures have not been updated since 2014 (until this meeting).

The city is scheduled to conduct the next five-year wastewater and water rate study within approximately the next 18 months.

Best practice is to conduct such studies every five years.

The upcoming comprehensive study will:

- Review all classifications and provide recommendations for meeting current industry standards.

- Ensure classifications align with other jurisdictions.

- Provide enhanced clarity for staff implementation (as the original resolution was quite vague).

Council Questions: None

Public Comment: None

ACTION: Motion by Council Member Carter, seconded by Council Member Woodall, to approve Resolution No. 1662-2026 updating the wastewater strength classification system. Motion carried 4-0.

L. COUNCIL REPORTS/COMMUNICATIONS

Mayor Pro Tem Carter:

Attended the Chamber of Commerce meeting on February 2, 2026.

Meeting focused largely on Wally Copini's "Fiesta Del Rio" event celebrating South American culture, to be held in June 2026 (specific date to be announced).

Event will feature bands, games, and sponsorships.

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The Chamber of Commerce will also move forward with a St. Patrick's Day event similar to last year's event at the Scotia Lodge, to be held in March (specific date to be confirmed, though March 17th was mentioned).

Attended Cal Cities Community Services Policy Committee meeting in Sacramento on January 22, 2026.

Expressed that the committee work is important and matters significantly to the City of Rio Dell.

Will keep Council updated as the legislative session proceeds.

Council Member Woodall:

No report.

Thanked Karen Dunham, noting they have worked together for 24 years.

Expressed that Karen was not supposed to retire until Council Member Woodall quit (said jokingly).

Council Member Orr:

No report.

Thanked Karen Dunham for her service, stating it has been a pleasure.

Mayor Garnes:

Gave recognition to the Fire Department, Police Department, and city staff for their response to an emergency the previous week.

Noted the emergency could have "gone sideways" but due to the focus and speed of reactions by staff, police, and fire departments, things turned out as well as they could.

Understood the Fire Department arrived within three minutes.

Thanked everyone for their quick response and coordination.

Attended a Cal Cities Environmental Quality meeting.

Participated in a roundtable discussion regarding earthquakes and FEMA response (or lack thereof).

The legislature will reintroduce a bill (AB 262) to help community members in the State in the coming legislative session for future disasters that do not meet the federal threshold.

Was informed she would be invited back to testify again.

Expressed support for Mayor Pro Tem Carter's participation on the Community Services Committee, stating if anyone can get results for the city from that committee, it will be Carter.

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Thanked Karen Dunham for everything and joked that she knows where Karen lives (so she can't hide).

No additional report beyond items discussed during the meeting.

M. ADJOURNMENT

ACTION: Motion to adjourn by Councilmember Carter, seconded by Councilmember Woodall. Motion carried 4-0.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 6:31 PM.

The next regular City Council meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, February 17, 2026 at 6:00 PM.

APPROVED:

Mayor Garnes

Date: _____

ATTEST:

Kyle Knopp, Acting City Clerk

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